SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

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by His Honour
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Mr. Speaker, Members of the House of Assembly and people of Newfoundland and Labrador:

On the ninth of February, half a world away from his hometown of Campbellton, Notre Dame Bay, Lieutenant-General Rick Hillier proudly took command of the International Security Assistance Force in war-torn Afghanistan. Though Newfoundland and Labrador is one of the most peaceful and safe places on Earth, we continue to produce thousands of young heroes whose courage and commitment to peace and liberty are without compromise. Today, we especially remember one such hero, Corporal Jamie Murphy of Conception Harbour, who, on the morning of January 27, gave his life in defence of those ideals. He was just 26. This tragedy has touched all of us very deeply. To the Murphy family, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians extend their heartfelt prayers and their deepest sympathies.

Our Cultural Heritage top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: The first known reference to the presence of French fishers in Newfoundland and Labrador waters dates back to 1504. Five hundred years later, from Labrador West to St. Lunaire- Griquet, from Port au Port to the old capital of "Plaisance", Newfoundland and Labrador is celebrating a half-millennium of "French Experience." Celebrating our French heritage and ties helps define our strong cultural identity; it adds to our quality of life; it expresses our sense of inclusion; it expands our knowledge and raises our pride in who we are; and it contributes to our cultural and linguistic diversity, including Canada's two official languages. Our people share a common Acadian heritage with those in other provinces such as Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island and with Acadians around the world. We are also celebrating the strong relationships we have cultivated with our French neighbours in Québec and St-Pierre and Miquelon. My Government commends the Fédération des Francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador for taking the lead in promoting this anniversary and drawing attention to our rich francophone cultural heritage, which has been so important in making all of us who we are.

Grâce à notre patrimoine français, nous sommes plus forts. Cette année, nous vous invitons tous à découvrir l'histoire française de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador et à fêter notre patrimoine avec nous.[1]

[1] *Translation: Because of our French heritage, we are stronger. This year, we invite everyone to discover the French history of Newfoundland and Labrador and celebrate our heritage with us.*

In 2000, the world celebrated with us the millennial anniversary of the completion of "the Full Circle", the convergence of westward-moving Vikings from Europe and eastward-moving Aboriginal people inhabiting Labrador and the Island. In the centuries that followed this great convergence of east and west, Newfoundland and Labrador, as a strategically-situated trading state, came to embrace people from countries, cultures and creeds the world over.

> ***Today, we are Aboriginal, French and English, Irish and Scottish, Chinese and East Indian, Polish and Bulgarian, Spanish and Portuguese and so many other ancestries – all of us Canadians – and at the same time, we are all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That rich legacy of convergence is among our greatest strengths.***

Among our greatest challenges is the need to bring about another kind of convergence – a coming together of what we are capable of accomplishing as a province and what we are actually getting done. It is high time Newfoundland and Labrador started living up to its potential.

The New Approach top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: On the 21st of October 2003, the voters of Newfoundland and Labrador elected a new Government with a strong mandate to pursue a new approach to governance and economic self-reliance in our great province. People voted for change, and my Government will deliver change for the better. The challenges confronting us did not occur overnight and will not be solved overnight, but they will be solved progressively over time. The initiatives my Government is bringing before the people's House this year represent a strong new beginning. My Government is determined to deliver open, accountable, effective governance as we embark on a strategy for success: to spend more effectively the revenues we already receive, and to generate new revenues by promoting business growth, new investment and new jobs. My Government's policies are rooted in solid economic fundamentals. They focus on promoting medium- and small-business development, better economic infrastructure, innovation and product diversification, expanding trade, sustainable resource management, a healthy environment, a highly-skilled workforce, a competitive tax system, and sound fiscal management. They focus on helping those who most need help to enable them to participate fully in their society by addressing the barriers that have marginalized women, persons with disabilities, people living in poverty, our Aboriginal people and the elderly.

> ***My Government will be guided in all of its decisions by a strong social conscience and a clear understanding that Newfoundland and Labrador will make significant social progress through economic growth and fiscal health.***

Three priorities will guide my Government's decisions for Newfoundland and Labrador over the coming year:

- firstly, to get our economy growing in a way that generates more jobs, investment, diversification and revenue here in our own communities;
- secondly, to use those revenues to finance low-waste, high-quality social programs;
- and thirdly, to improve federal-provincial relations in concrete ways that bring real benefits to the people, economy and treasury of Newfoundland and Labrador.

That is my Government's new approach to governance and self-reliance in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Sustainable Resource Management top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: Newfoundland and Labrador is blessed with a bounty of natural resources. Our natural environment is still our most important economic asset. Clean water and clean air are priceless natural endowments. The fisheries, forests, soil, wildlife and minerals are worth billions of dollars annually. My Government is determined to build on our traditional strengths by better managing the development of the resources on which vital provincial industries are based.

My Government has already established the new Department of Environment and Conservation and the new Department of Natural Resources, which will work cooperatively for the protection of our sensitive ecosystems and the sustainable development of our resources.

My Government will commence work to develop, within two years, a Sustainable Development Act that will ensure our natural resources, both renewable and nonrenewable, are developed responsibly in ways that maximize benefits to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and protect and conserve our natural environment and our natural heritage. This Sustainable Development Act will be the legislative framework for a Strategic Environmental Management Plan, the purpose of which will be to achieve environmental and economic sustainability and a high quality of life for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. My Government will also enhance the strategic environmental review component of internal government processes to ensure environmental considerations are fully appreciated and addressed in submissions to Cabinet.

My Government will also support the proposal before the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency to establish in Corner Brook a Centre for Excellence in Environmental Research, Development, Science and Technology, which will partner with Memorial University and Sir Wilfred Grenfell College to make the Corner Brook area a national leader in environmental sciences.

Fisheries and Aquaculture top

No industry is in greater need of the application of sustainable development practices than our fishing industry, one of the province's largest private-sector employers. Entire regional economies are based on the harvesting and processing of fisheries resources. Our transportation, fuel, technology and service industries rely on the business the fishing industry generates.

While my Government is determined to better manage fisheries responsibilities within its jurisdiction, it is deeply concerned that Newfoundland and Labrador has too weak a role in fisheries management. Canada dictates resource allocations in waters within the country's 200-mile exclusive economic zone while the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) decides allocations in waters of the continental shelf outside the 200-mile limit. My Government will pursue a Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador fisheries agreement to give the province a greater say in fisheries management within Canada's economic zone and will also continue to urge the Government of Canada to impose custodial management on the continental shelf immediately outside Canada's 200-mile limit where such action is warranted to preserve fish stocks from international unsustainable harvesting practices.

Conservation decisions as well as economic planning decisions should reflect a broad body of scientific data, the findings of fish harvesters, and the interpretations brought to bear on that information by the specialists at the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (FRCC). My

Government welcomes the recent announcement by the Government of Canada that its fisheries management decisions regarding Gulf cod this year will be guided by the recommendations of the FRCC. My Government reaffirms the collective belief of Members of this Legislature that this fishery should be reopened.

While many of the world's wild fisheries are in decline, aquaculture promises to replace much of the supply. My Government is determined to increase the availability of raw fish product and to bolster our aquaculture industry by investing in a cod aquaculture development program.

My Government is also prepared to increase the return Newfoundlanders and Labradorians receive on the fish products they produce by working, in consultation with the industry, to enhance the quality assurance program and develop a comprehensive, long-term marketing program.

My Government is particularly concerned about the uncertainty that has gripped the industry's shellfish sector in recent years. To bring stability to the province's fish processing sector, my Government has accepted in principle the recommendations of the 2003 Final Report of the Fish Processing Policy Review Commission, chaired by Eric Dunne, and will use this report as the foundation for a renewed processing policy.

Agriculture top

Agriculture is another industry with phenomenal growth potential. Through value-added production, industry diversification, land development, technology and marketing, farmers and others in the industry are already beginning to take better advantage of the boundless opportunities for growth. With increasing emphasis among consumers on food quality and safety, new opportunities are opening up for agriculture and the preparation of specialty food products. My Government will help agricultural enterprises to access capital and commercialize so they can take better advantage of opportunities for expansion and even greater success.

Energy top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: Though Newfoundland and Labrador is an energy-rich province, we will not be the principal beneficiaries of the revenues generated from any of our key energy projects – Hibernia, Terra Nova, White Rose or the Upper Churchill – under existing fiscal arrangements. Returns from the petroleum sector are a particular source of frustration because, under the Atlantic Accord between our province and Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador should be the principal beneficiary from the development of, and the revenues generated by, the oil and gas resources off its shores. Even following the full application of the Accord's 12-year equalization offset formula, Canada will receive about six times as much in revenues from our offshore oil and gas projects as Newfoundland and Labrador will receive. Once those petroleum resources are gone, so too is the opportunity to benefit from their extraction and use. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that Newfoundland and Labrador must not and will not miss.

> ***My Government will not rest until we have reached, with the Government of Canada, an equitable arrangement on petroleum revenues that reflects the intent of the federal and provincial governments when the Atlantic Accord was signed, that Newfoundland and Labrador would be the principal beneficiary of such developments.***

My Government takes tremendous encouragement from the support it has garnered from leaders

across the country for a re-balancing of offshore revenues to the benefit of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The New Economy top

While offshore petroleum developments have not delivered the revenues to which our province is entitled, they have nevertheless fostered increased self-confidence in our province's business community. My Government believes, as do economic leaders and innovators, that the time has come for Newfoundland and Labrador to set its sights on other opportunities in the knowledge economy. Thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are employed in high-knowledge, high-skills jobs across Canada and around the world. They compete with the best and they perform with the best. Our younger generations are tech-savvy, bold and ambitious. They innovate with ease, they embrace change with confidence, and they seek new challenges that bring greater rewards. Unfortunately, too many of our youth have to leave the province to find jobs that match their talents and skills.

My Government is determined to help our young people to achieve their career goals here at home so they can apply their talents in building a more prosperous province.

My Government will begin work this year to develop a comprehensive innovation strategy that identifies and builds upon emerging opportunities in a wide range of disciplines: for example, information technology, engineering, marine science, and environmental technologies addressing climate change and waste management. Memorial University is already undertaking groundbreaking research and development in a wide range of disciplines and is opening doors to new kinds of careers. My Government will identify opportunities to best support post-secondary education and training to ensure that even more Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are able to compete successfully for lucrative careers on the cutting edge.

In the past, many solid economic development opportunities in this province have gone unrealized for a lack of champions or a lack of coordination among departments and between the provincial and federal governments. Hundreds of long-term jobs can be created in such areas as agrifoods, waste management, mining, energy and tourism if government was to properly coordinate its activities in support of the private sector. To ensure that viable projects and opportunities move quickly from concept to reality, my Government will direct the Economic Policy Committee of Cabinet to take on the added role of an Economic Initiatives Committee. It will be charged with coordinating the efforts of departments and agencies, breaking logjams where they exist, and facilitating decisions. Government must support the private sector by playing an enabling role in the pursuit of new jobs.

The tremendous opportunities associated with the new economy serve to complement the incredible opportunities associated with our traditional or resource-based industries. My Government will work to identify new avenues for growth in mining and mineral exploration, oil and gas exploration offshore, forestry, wildlife, tourism and culture while preparing ourselves for opportunities on the cutting edge of technology.

Education top

The fuel of the new economy is knowledge. Our young people are best prepared for emerging opportunities when our education system provides them with the skills they need to succeed. My Government will make world-class education among its highest

priorities.

My Government recognizes that education is a lifelong process beginning in a child's earliest years. In order to reach students in their critical formative years, my Government will establish a Ministerial Council for Early Childhood Learning to foster comprehensive programs across all government departments and agencies that focus on the learning needs of children and their families. For students in the K-to-12 system, my Government will set achievement standards in core areas of school curriculum, including language arts and mathematics, and further develop a process for assessing and disclosing school performance.

My Government will also ensure the province's school buses are safe and well maintained and schools are safe and conducive to learning. Education does not end at high school graduation. Higher levels of education mean higher incomes for graduates and stronger investment opportunities for the economy. My Government will commission a White Paper on Post-secondary Education to examine post-secondary concerns, affordability and accessibility and to identify initiatives that will enhance the employment prospects of graduates. The White Paper will also examine whether our university and public college are meeting their potential to attract investment and generate economic development opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador. With their world-class instructors and technological resources, these public institutions are well-positioned to partner with industry and the community to conduct a wide range of basic and applied research that has strong economic development opportunities.

In order to better prepare students and lifelong learners to take advantage of the benefits education brings, my Government will initiate a more focused and coordinated approach to career planning. In order to encourage and enable more of our citizens to pursue higher education, my Government has announced a freeze on tuition fees at both Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic for the 2004/05 academic year.

Infrastructure top

In order to attract new investment and compete more successfully, Newfoundland and Labrador requires not only a well-educated work force but also a solid foundation of reliable infrastructure. Investing in infrastructure is one of the most effective ways governments can stimulate job creation in the short term and make the economy more productive and competitive over the long term.

Unfortunately, in many parts of Newfoundland and Labrador today, existing infrastructure is deteriorating from the inability to service the many demands within available resources. Preventative maintenance is far less costly than outright replacement or extensive repairs down the road. Our province will bridge the large gap between the infrastructure we have and the infrastructure we need only if we proceed strategically and progressively in accordance with a plan. My Government will develop a comprehensive infrastructure strategy to guide investments in public infrastructure in a manner that promotes growth. My Government will also work closely with the province's municipalities to ensure they are well-prepared to attract new investment and jobs.

A significant component of the infrastructure gap is the isolation of the entire Island and most of Labrador from the North American highway grid. Our people and companies are at the mercy of costly air and sea transportation links as a consequence of our disconnection from the highway grid. My Government, in cooperation with the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, will conduct a pre-feasibility study to determine whether and how it is practical to construct a fixed link connecting

Labrador and the Island.

My Government is determined to open up the new frontier of Labrador to new opportunities that will be of particular benefit to Labrador's communities, people and economy. To that end, my Government has just announced its intention to proceed this year with Phase III of the Trans-Labrador Highway construction project connecting Happy Valley-Goose Bay to Cartwright and thereby completing the highway from Labrador West to Southern Labrador.

A Pivotal Role for Labrador top

For far too long, the people, resources and potential of Labrador have been ignored and excluded from the decision-making processes of the province. We can no longer tolerate this atmosphere of exclusion. We must recognize that Labrador will play a pivotal role in the future success of this province. We must create meaningful employment opportunities, optimize resource benefits and develop infrastructure that results in a stronger, more vibrant economy.

Business top

> ***My Government's goal is to make Newfoundland and Labrador a magnet for investment and a mecca for talent.***

To this end, my First Minister will oversee a new Department of Business to facilitate growth and investment throughout rural and urban Newfoundland and Labrador. This year and in the years to come, my First Minister will meet one on one with many businesses operating in our province – for example, oil companies, mining companies, paper companies, major retailers and small business owners alike – to determine what my Government can do to enhance business success and job creation in our province. My Government recognizes and celebrates the strong role and tremendous successes of entrepreneurs and innovators in many sectors of our economy, including our creative and cultural industries which have helped to shape who we are. My Government also recognizes the vital role of workers, unions and employers in laying the foundation for business growth and job creation.

Not only will my Government consult with businesses currently operating in the province about the environment they need in order to grow, but it will also aggressively pursue investors from outside the province, encouraging them to establish and invest in operations throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Many of the contracts generated in the province each year are publicly-funded. To enable businesses in the province to compete fairly for public work, my Government will initiate a supplier development program to help local firms supply quality goods and services at competitive costs to government departments and agencies.

Economic and Social Policy top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

> ***Economic policy and social policy cannot be viewed in exclusion of one another. They are indivisible. Investments in sound social initiatives promoting education, health and the welfare of our people generate economic activity both directly and indirectly while at the same time making Newfoundland and Labrador far more enticing to investors. At the same time, economic policies that get businesses growing and people working also generate the revenues government***

needs to finance further progress on social programs and infrastructure.

The province fares best when its government's social and economic policies are designed to function in ways that complement one another.

My Government is particularly concerned about the challenges confronting our rural communities and the businesses that operate in them. It acknowledges, and is appreciative of, the contributions made to our province and our communities by the volunteer sector, including a host of community service organizations, advocacy associations and regional development agencies. The time has come to build on these partnerships with concrete initiatives that produce measurable results. To that end, my Government has established a new Rural Secretariat as the focal point for government to work with local and regional partners to build strong and dynamic communities. The Secretariat will serve alongside the Departments of Business and of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development as a coordinating agent for rural renewal. It will embrace and build on the work of the Strategic Social Plan. The Secretariat will be tasked with promoting the well-being of rural Newfoundland and Labrador through a comprehensive approach aimed at integrating economic, social and cultural aspects of rural and regional development. As well as working with local and regional partners to make sure the provincial government understands and acts in response to local and regional issues, the Rural Secretariat will help communities and regions identify and take advantage of growth opportunities. My Government will also support small- and medium-sized private enterprise and cooperative initiatives in all regions of the province.

Health top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: The dispersal of our small population among hundreds of mostly-rural communities presents significant challenges to my Government, particularly with respect to the delivery of essential health services.

My Government is determined to ensure that all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will be able to access the essential health care services they need when they need them.

The structure of our health system was designed 30 to 50 years ago, at a time when the population was concentrated in different regions, when the average age was much younger than today, when technologies were less expensive, when highways were less developed, and when telecommunications did not offer the same advantages. Changes in all these areas have created a need to reassess the structure of health care delivery in the province. We need to ask whether the current structure is overburdened with administration at the expense of front-line services. We must ask whether access to physicians and other health professionals can be more stable in rural communities. In a time of fiscal restraint, we must ask which services can be made more efficient, without compromising accepted standards of quality. The answers to these types of questions are the key to making our health system more sustainable over time. My Government will pursue solutions in the health system which promote quality, access and effectiveness.

My Government is particularly concerned about the provision of community mental health services, especially in rural areas. With this in mind, my Government will therefore develop and implement a new mental health plan.

My Government is also concerned about the care available to our seniors. To that end, my Government will establish a Division of Aging and Seniors in the Health and Community Services

Department and also a Ministerial Advisory Council for Aging and Seniors to ensure that the needs and concerns of seniors are properly understood and properly addressed. My Government will establish a strategy for healthy aging in the seniors' population.

My Government is working to develop a comprehensive long-term care and supportive services strategy to address the whole continuum of service, including home support, supportive living, personal care homes and nursing homes, for a full range of individuals, such as seniors, persons with disabilities and children with special needs. Within the context of such a plan, my Government will pursue strategic investments to ensure the right levels of care are available for the changing needs of the population.

Children and Families

top

Poverty remains a significant concern in our province. According to the National Council of Welfare, Newfoundland and Labrador's level of child poverty is the highest in the country. Poverty is often associated with poor nutrition and poor health. Hungry children who cannot focus on their studies at school often face poor career prospects as a consequence. People living in poverty are denied many opportunities to reach their potential for self-reliance, and for this reason, poverty takes a significant bite out of the province's economy while profoundly affecting the lives of those it directly touches.

> ***My Government is determined to facilitate a progressive reduction in Newfoundland and Labrador's rate of poverty until we achieve the lowest rate of poverty in the country. To help our most vulnerable citizens, my Government will act to reduce the burden of taxation, taking measures to alleviate poverty and ensuring children and families receive appropriate support.***

People living with disabilities sometimes face considerable employment challenges that leave them frustrated and impoverished. My Government will expand the supported-employment program for people with disabilities to facilitate their full participation in the work force. My Government will also establish an Equal Opportunities Committee of the House of Assembly to monitor and report on equality issues and promote mainstreaming of equal opportunities in the House of Assembly and throughout government.

Justice and Safety

top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

> ***For decades, the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have done an exemplary job of protecting people and property throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. My Government is cognizant of the difficult conditions under which our police officers have sometimes worked and is determined to enhance public safety by making sound investments in policing.***

In order to ensure there will be more officers available to patrol our streets and protect our families, my Government will contract with Memorial University to train 75 new RNC cadets over the next three years and thereby create 45 new RNC positions and replace 30 officers who will be lost through attrition. An additional four RCMP positions will be created for Labrador.

My Government is following with deep interest the inquiry by retired Chief Justice Antonio Lamer into

the administration of justice in the cases of Gregory Parsons, Randy Druken and Ronald Dalton. Though the inquiry has not concluded, my Government is learning from these proceedings and is preparing to act decisively and effectively on the inquiry's findings and recommendations to restore faith among Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in the integrity of their justice system.

Violence and the threat of violence, sadly, continues to be a major issue for many women in our province. My Government is renewing its commitment to address this and other issues of special concern to women in order for our people to share equitably in the social and economic benefits of our province, irrespective of their gender. My Government will work to ensure women's voices are heard and women's needs are addressed.

Aboriginal Communities top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: My Government recognizes the aspiration of Aboriginal communities to exercise genuine control over their own affairs. My Government will work in partnership with these communities and the Government of Canada so that our Aboriginal people can realize their desire to become more self-reliant. My Government is pleased with the progress that has been made to date and is looking forward to further progress on several initiatives involving our Aboriginal communities, such as ratification of the Inuit land claim, negotiations on the landless band concept for the Federation of Newfoundland Indians, reserve creation at Sheshatshiu, and reserve expansion at Conne River. My Government will also work with the Labrador Métis Nation to understand the implications, if any, of the recent Powley decision.

Democratic Reform top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: No institution in this province has a greater impact on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador than their Legislature. It is here, in the people's House, that policies are applied, legislation is passed, supply is sought, taxes are imposed, petitions are heard, questions are asked and information is provided. It is here, in the people's House, that all the operations of government find their foundation. Nothing my Government does is beyond the power or influence of this Legislature, and nothing this Legislature does is beyond the power or influence of the people. Still, far too often, people have expressed a sense of alienation from the institutions that have governed them. A Legislature that alienates its people loses its legitimacy. Therefore, my Government will restore the House of Assembly to its rightful place as "the people's House" by significantly strengthening its role.

My Government has championed the first election in this province of an independent Speaker, a Member who will not sit in a caucus or be eligible for a Cabinet appointment during the term of a Legislature over which he or she presides.

> ***My Government will ask the Legislature to adopt a strict code of conduct for all Members, to be enforced by the Commissioner of Members' Interests, emphasizing Members' accountability to the wider public interest and to their constituents, and the need for openness, honesty and integrity in their dealings with the public, constituents and lobbying organizations.***

It will ask the Members of the House of Assembly to adopt new procedures to provide for the proper auditing and disclosure of Members' expenses. It will amend the House of Assembly Act and the Elections Act to require elections at fixed four-year intervals and to impose a tighter timetable for byelections when seats become vacant. No district should again be left without representation for an

unreasonable period.

Far too often in government, the will of the people is sidelined by special interests. My Government will introduce lobbyists legislation to reduce the influence of money and special interests. My Government will also proclaim new access to information and protection of privacy legislation and require public institutions to function more transparently and accountably. Moreover, my Government will regularly release information of its own accord in the interest of transparency and honesty. Knowledge is power. By empowering people with knowledge about their public institutions, my Government will address the problem of alienation and better enable the people of our province to become masters and commanders of their own destiny.

Effective and Efficient Government top

Everyone knows by now that Newfoundland and Labrador faces profound fiscal challenges that cannot be ignored.

> ***My Government is determined to restore the integrity of the province's finances responsibly and progressively over time in order to place the province in a stronger position, both fiscally and economically, to take on the challenges ahead. My Government will maintain its commitment to fiscal discipline to ensure the province begins to live within its means.***

My Government is working cooperatively and constructively with our public sector unions to negotiate new collective agreements that, to the greatest extent possible, meet the aspirations of our public employees within the context of the province's fiscal means. My Government's commitment to positive labour relations and harmony in the workforce is solid. While there are short-term challenges that cannot be ignored, my Government is working with our public employees to identify long-term solutions that will bring greater rewards down the line.

No government has all the answers. Good government is about developing solutions through constructive partnerships. My Government this year sought the direct input of public employees in the identification of efficiencies in the operation of government. Almost 900 submissions received to date are now being evaluated, and those that are prudent will be considered for implementation. Already, my Government has restructured and streamlined departments and other public entities to ensure they function effectively within fiscal constraints. My Government stands by its commitment to avoid massive layoffs in the public service while taking advantage of opportunities to achieve savings, where possible and prudent, through attrition.

These are the choices a government faces when fiscal resources are severely strapped. It is important that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have access to timely and accurate information about the state of the province's finances so they understand the nature of the fiscal constraints under which the government operates. This fall, my Government will introduce a new Transparency and Accountability Act to adopt formally the more-accurate consolidated accrual accounting for budgeting, require three-year forecasts for significant initiatives, and require semi-annual economic and fiscal updates. It will also adopt a more-rigorous standard for releasing and acting upon the reports it commissions.

My Government is determined to ensure public money is not being squandered. To that end, it has directed the Government Purchasing Agency to administer public purchasing decisions in a way that will get maximum benefit from the taxpayer's dollar while promoting business opportunities for

companies in Newfoundland and Labrador. The agency will be given greater autonomy to assess bids and recommend purchases in accordance with fair and objective criteria. In addition, my Government will take a hard look at public expenditures on such things as cellular telephones, government-owned vehicles, and leased or owned office space to ensure scarce tax dollars are not being wasted. My Government is determined to promote efficiency and effectiveness in government to ensure it extracts from the provincial economy no more in taxes than can be justified.

A Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Partnership top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: Newfoundland and Labrador is proud to be a partner in the Canadian federation. However, my Government is deeply troubled that our province, so rich in resources and opportunities, continues to lead the country in its unemployment rate, has suffered protracted periods of population decline that are expected to continue, and has a significant number of children living in families with low incomes, despite having led the country in economic growth in recent years. What does equality in principle mean if does not enable us to achieve fairness and equity in fact?

> ***My Government is determined to forge a new future for Newfoundland and Labrador in the Canadian federation – a future in which the principles of equity and fairness are put to work for the greater benefit of Newfoundland and Labrador.***

My Government will establish a Newfoundland and Labrador Office of Federal-Provincial Relations in Ottawa in order to give our province a stronger, more-assertive, more-effective presence in the nation's capital. My Government will be right there, imaginatively and aggressively focusing attention on Newfoundland and Labrador's concerns about equalization, health and social transfers, oil and gas revenues, Canada's share in Hibernia, fisheries management, infrastructure, Churchill Falls, military training at Goose Bay, and the numerous other issues, big and small, that affect the people and economy of Newfoundland and Labrador. Our overriding focus will be on enabling Newfoundland and Labrador to achieve its full potential within the Canadian family.

Three Priorities top

My Government is prepared to take full responsibility for obligations and opportunities within its jurisdiction irrespective of the actions of the Government of Canada or any other party. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians elected a working government that will deliver what it has promised. Over the course of the year ahead and the remainder of the term that follows, my Government will take action on its commitment to a new approach by developing initiatives to grow businesses and jobs in order to generate the revenues we need to deliver top-quality social programs. Again, that is the new approach. Only through cooperation and hard work will Newfoundland and Labrador be ready and able to seize control of its own destiny, to chart a course to greater economic prosperity, and to realize our true potential within Canada.

In summary, three priorities will guide my Government's decisions for Newfoundland and Labrador over the coming year:

- firstly, to get our economy growing in a way that generates more jobs, investment, diversification and revenue here in our own communities;

- secondly, to use those revenues to finance low-waste, high-quality social programs;

- and thirdly, to improve federal-provincial relations in concrete ways that bring real benefits to the people, economy and treasury of Newfoundland and Labrador.

My Government is ushering in a new era of good government and genuine economic growth in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is delivering on its commitment to be, at all times, open and accountable to the people for what it does on their behalf. It is delivering on its promise to consult before it acts and to be inclusive when it consults. It is delivering on its obligation to make decisions that are in the best long-term interests of Newfoundland and Labrador, even at the expense of short-term political gain. My Government recognizes and celebrates the tremendous opportunities now before us and is prepared to be bold and ambitious in preparing our province to capitalize on those opportunities. Throughout the year and term ahead, my Government will set its sights high and settle for nothing less than the best that can be achieved through hard work and an unshakable belief in ourselves. That is the new attitude – the new approach – that is going to begin turning things around for the better throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

In the words of poet E.J. Pratt:

"Here the winds blow, / And here they die, / Not with that wild, exotic rage / That vainly sweeps untrodden shores, / But with familiar breath / Holding a partnership with life, / Resonant with the hopes of spring, / Pungent with the airs of harvest."

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Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: Estimates of expenditure will be laid before you in due course and you will be asked to grant supply to Her Majesty.

I invoke God's blessing upon you as you commence this new Session.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberation.

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